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PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION

SUMMARY

The present document reports on and analyses major new trends and developments of UNICEF programme cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa region during 1993.

The UNICEF regional office has responsibility for UNICEF cooperation in the following countries and territories: Algeria, Bahrain, Cyprus, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Yemen, as well as the West Bank and Gaza.

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I. POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN

1. The highlight of 1993 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was the historic agreement signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on 13 September. While negotiations on the substance of the agreement are still in progress, the prospect of peace and autonomy in the occupied territories offers a unique opportunity for regional development and renewed commitment by Governments in the region to put children first on their national development agendas. The process of democratization is proceeding, exemplified by national multi-party elections in Jordan, and post-war national reconstruction is keeping a rapid pace in Lebanon, particularly in the private sector.

2. In other countries of the region, however, children face a climate of instability and uncertainty. Civil conflict continues to compound the sufferings of part of the population of Djibouti. The Israeli-PLO peace accord has not lessened violence in the West Bank and Gaza or in southern Lebanon. Unresolved political issues continue to have adverse consequences for children in Iraq, as does internal violence in Algeria. The slump in world oil prices has aggravated the economic burden of high domestic expenditures and the consequences of the 1991 Gulf War in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia. UNICEF continues to support major emergency operations in Iraq and the Sudan. In southern Lebanon, UNICEF participated in an exemplary inter-agency emergency programme, providing resources to restore health services, water supply and environmental sanitation in public schools. Emergency assistance also was provided to flood victims in Yemen.

II. HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAMME, REGIONAL COOPERATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A. The decade goals: placing children first

3. Despite the climate of uncertainty in much of the region, advocacy for children continues to advance. Following the high-level ministerial meeting held in Tunis in November 1992, which adopted the Pan Arab Plan for Child Survival, Protection and Development, the League of Arab States has continued to affirm its commitment to the decade goals for children. The League is planning a high-level regional meeting in March 1994 to assess progress of member countries in achieving the mid-decade goals. In 1993, as a follow-up to the Tunis meeting, UNICEF published a series of situation analyses of the Arab, Gulf and Maghreb child. At the national level, the preparation and adoption of national programmes of action attained or approached completion in most countries of the region. The principal challenges to programme of action implementation are the difficulties encountered in accurately determining costs and in elaborating strategies for resource mobilization, whether from public, private or international sources. In response, a UNICEF team has developed a regional fund-raising strategy to mobilize financial support within the region for national programmes of action and to achieve the mid-decade goals for children. In all countries of the region, mid-decade work plans are nearing completion; a regional system will be operational in early 1994 to monitor on a

quarterly basis progress towards achievement of the goals and to highlight problems that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the goals are met.

4. Particular emphasis is being placed on subnational planning to redress regional disparities and to reach pockets of poverty and underserved groups. The rapid pace of urbanization in the region underscores the importance of addressing the needs of the urban poor. Significant disparities exist between wealthy States and the region's six poorest countries - Djibouti, Egypt, Morocco, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen - all of which have a per capita gross national product below $1,000. As these countries also face the greatest challenges in achieving the mid-decade goals, the MENA Regional Office is giving them priority attention in mobilizing technical and financial support. Existing political or economic groupings of States in the Maghreb and Gulf regions, including Yemen, are being encouraged to work together to ensure achievement of goals requiring subregional cooperation, for example, the eradication of poliomyelitis. In the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, subregional cooperation is being promoted to ensure completion of national programmes of action and to promote ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the remaining non-signatory countries, which will complete the ratification process throughout the region.

5. UNICEF is seeking to implement the recommendations of the multi-donor evaluation with regard to capacity-building and empowerment through networking, technical exchanges and the production and dissemination of user-friendly information to assist partners in addressing the problems of children in the MENA region. The main thrust of social mobilization and advocacy networking in 1993 has been the promotion of child rights - both to achieve universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to support implementation of child rights strategies and activities at national and community levels. Meetings of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional unions and associations of Arab parliamentarians, writers, lawyers, paediatricians and others have developed action plans to promote child rights. Collaboration with the Arab States Broadcasting Union has led to the exposure of scriptwriters, directors and producers in most countries of the region to child rights issues and to the production of programmes and shorter-format broadcasts on child rights. The organization of a meeting of deans of regional law schools is under way to advance the process of alliance formation. The MENA Regional Office is forming networks of professionals to promote the "child first" concept. In the health field, a group of deans of medical and nursing schools from the region met in Jordan to consider how to refocus medical teaching and training on preventive medicine and on maternal and child health. A group of researchers, policy makers and practitioners met to analyse the changing functions and structure of the Arab family; the meeting report and accompanying Bibliography of Sources will form the basis for family-focused activities taking into account changing intra-family relationships, especially those involving the status and multiple roles of women.

6. The regional office gives high priority to putting knowledge to work for children. In addition to the publication of a number of situation analyses, thematic kits have been produced and disseminated on breast-feeding, learning for all, Facts for Life messages, children and the environment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The regional Infopack on the decade

goals for children has been updated and distributed, and a technical reader on the decade health goals has been disseminated throughout the region.

B. Evaluation and monitoring

7. The regional office continued to consolidate its role in strengthening the management of the evaluation function. The Data Entry Enhancement and Display System computer software package (DEEDS), developed in the region to enhance capacity to monitor national programme implementation, to track progress towards achievement of decade goals and to produce progress reports for policy makers and managers, has now been installed in government departments, NGOs and UNICEF offices throughout the region. DEEDS is being adapted by UNICEF headquarters for incorporation into the organization's global goals monitoring system. The electronic CHILDNET network is being rapidly expanded to link UNICEF partners in the MENA region, North America and Europe to network databases, to provide on-conferencing capability and to facilitate rapid information exchange and programme monitoring.

8. The Projects in Progress series has provided systematic reporting of positive experiences by collecting and disseminating evaluation and research findings. Important experience was gained through the organization of external peer review meetings in the areas of health, nutrition, control of diarrhoeal diseases (CDD) and epidemiology. Following UNICEF Executive Board decision 1993/5 (E/ICEF/1993/14), the Regional Office, in close cooperation with country offices, prepared a Regional Report on Findings and Lessons Learned, based on 20 evaluations of existing experiences and a set of evaluation/study summaries and scoring sheets. The report, by highlighting weaknesses in conceptualization of assessment processes, is a useful basis for upgrading evaluation standards in the region. A regional evaluation consultation held in November examined the report and considered how to improve the effectiveness, applicability and coordination of studies and evaluations. Particular attention was paid to improving the evaluation function at the subnational level and to the need to assess and build upon the evaluation capacities of UNICEF and the Governments of the region.

C. Learning for the twenty-first century

9. The acquisition of knowledge and skills for living continues to be the flagship sphere of activity for UNICEF in the MENA region and the method of support for educational innovation. A regional group of experts reviewed and edited a study on the promotion of girls' education, focusing on strategies to increase both access and relevance. The study is being published for dissemination to policy makers and educators throughout the region and beyond. In the first year of a three-year initiative in the field of early childhood development, innovative use is being made of videos and the mass media to empower parents and caregivers with the knowledge and skills needed to nurture and enhance their children's development in the first six years of life. Using a combination of animation and culture-specific segments, production is under way on the first two of a series of five videos, together with accompanying guidebooks for parents and community group trainers. Six countries - Iraq,

Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey and Tunisia - are currently involved in the regional initiative. Using video modules and print materials that can be adapted for use either on television or in community-based parent education activities, the initiative is designed to reach the majority of parents in any country. By 1995, the video series and supporting products will be made available globally for adaptation and application.

10. In Jordan, a national survey of competencies in mathematics and language was carried out, forming the basis for a system to assess learning achievement throughout the country. Jordan is participating in the global United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/UNICEF assessment of learning achievement, in which Morocco and Tunisia also have agreed to participate. Likewise, Lebanon has expressed interest. In Jordan and Lebanon, a global education initiative is focusing on the development of a future-oriented concept of school education, which emphasizes building the self-esteem of students and promoting tolerance, conflict resolution skills, interdependent learning approaches, cooperative behaviour and critical thinking. It also seeks to develop the capacities of the teacher as a communicator and facilitator of a student-oriented, active learning approach. In 1993, three education modules, Learning to Live Together, Images of Ourselves, Images of Others and Futures, were developed by educators and teachers. Through interactive training methods, groups of teachers have been trained to use the modules, which will be field-tested in schools in Jordan and Lebanon in 1994.

11. The regional office's innovative Communication for Learning initiative recognizes the potential of the mass media as a learning medium and aims to strengthen the capacity of television to promote and support child survival, protection and development. Its aim is to make television a positive educational force. In 1993, activities included the production of quality programmes, spots and news-fillers for and about the child; the training of directors, producers and scriptwriters in improved production techniques and in child rights and on the mid-decade goals; experience exchanges between professional media networks within and outside the region; initiation of a directory of media resource persons and centres; and the compilation and dissemination of the best examples of television programming related to child growth and development, child rights, non-violence and other positive social values and attitudes.

D. Children in armed conflict

12. Bearing in mind the number of conflicts in the region, the regional programme on children - victims of armed conflict, initiated in 1993, focuses on the psycho-social needs of children traumatized by exposure to extreme violence and armed conflict. The programme seeks to redress the lack of regional networks, training opportunities and culturally appropriate resource materials in trauma psychology by supporting development initiatives and by creating prototype training materials, manuals, plans and resource books that can be tailored to meet individual country and community needs. It seeks to assist community workers and professionals in a range of disciplines and to develop the skills to help traumatized children and their parents overcome the effects of trauma. In 1993, the first meeting of a new regional network was held to

develop a plan of action. Progress has been made in developing prototype training and orientation manuals to guide pre-school teachers, schoolteachers and counsellors as well as a prototype school crisis plan designed to make the school a community resource centre in situations of emergency and of traumatic stress for children.

E. Progress towards health for all children

13. Substantial progress was made in 1993 in laying the groundwork for achievement of the mid-decade goals and goals for the year 2000. Although a few countries in the region have yet to regain 1990 immunization levels, most sustained universal child immunization achievements despite competing demands for finances and increasing costs of vaccines. There has been progress in the use of the high-risk approach in the reduction and elimination of neonatal tetanus and measles. Specific interventions were stressed, such as the Maghrebian National Immunization Days and the training or retraining of midwives to reduce the number of deaths from neonatal tetanus and reduce maternal mortality in general. Regional initiatives targeting subregional and subnational zones for the elimination of disease were advanced by the identification of poliomyelitis-free zones in the Gulf and Maghreb countries. The zones are expected to encompass eventually the entire Arabian Peninsula and the Maghreb region, a major step in reaching the goal of eradication of poliomyelitis.

14. CDD activities continues to be a central focus in most countries of the region. Corrective measures in CDD programmes included modifying the goal of oral rehydration therapy plus feeding; holding national CDD reviews; and organizing a regional peer group meeting on CDD, nutrition and epidemiology, to review the latest evaluations and studies as a basis for determining improvements in the development and management of CDD programmes. Issues of home management of diarrhoea, referral, the production, distribution and marketing of oral rehydration salts and measurement indicators to monitor progress are all addressed in mid-decade goal work plans.

15. A second regional peer review meeting focused on women's reproductive health, producing recommendations related to policy formulation and programme implementation. In response to the growing awareness and recognition of acute respiratory infections (ARI) as a major killer of children under five years of age, many countries have initiated ARI control programmes, of which 10 are already operational, including national plans of action, adherence to standards and appropriate case management. Five other countries are in the planning stages of an ARI control programme. Control of iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) throughout the region has been advanced by the adoption of universal salt iodization as the principal strategy. All countries in the region participated in a regional IDD consultation and a few flagship countries developed extensive control programmes. National participation in the International Conference on Nutrition led to the development of national commitments to end micronutrient deficiencies by 1995, especially of vitamin A, and to reduce iron deficiency anaemia by the end of the decade.

16. The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative is proceeding well, the major challenge being certification of private sector hospitals. There are now baby-friendly hospitals in almost every country in the region. Most countries have passed legislation banning the distribution of free and low-cost infant formula. The importance and value of breast-feeding is being integrated into the curricula of medical schools, with a regional effort to make medical education more sensitive to the needs of women and children. At mid-year, UNICEF health officers were brought together for a briefing on technical issues related to decade goals in the health sector.

F. Coordination and management issues

17. In the implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/199 (22 December 1992) concerning field coordination, the Syrian Arab Republic became the first country in the region to institute an inter-agency plan to complete a country strategy note by early 1994. In all other countries in the region, United Nations agencies have reviewed programme cycles with government counterparts. Timetables for the harmonization of agency and government programme cycles have been proposed for each country.

18. A recent UNICEF internal audit of MENA country offices highlighted the need to improve management practices and internal control procedures. The regional office has instituted a regional audit committee to review and follow up on audit recommendations and to ensure compliance by UNICEF offices. The regional office, Office of Internal Audit and Staff Development and Training Section have embarked on a joint venture to produce a management training package for representatives which will form the basis for a regional training workshop for heads of offices in 1994.